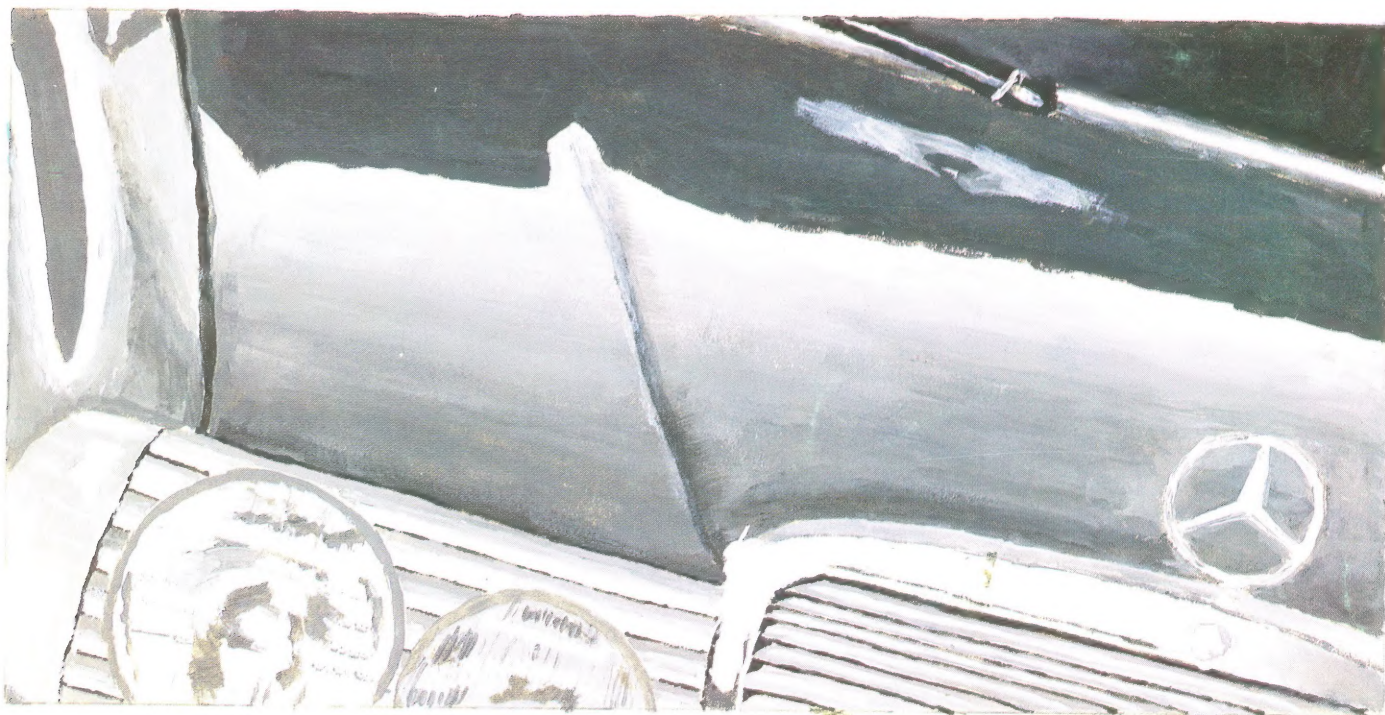


The Circle

Volume 14 No. 1

Winter 1989



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Inside the Circle

If this issue of *The Circle* is not as thick as others have been, it's because we tried hard to choose only the best and most appropriate from the material submitted to us. Which is not to say that all or any of the work here is altogether excellent or altogether appropriate for our audience of Auburn students—it most certainly is not altogether excellent, as you can see by reading this tortured sentence. But the whole magazine is just like that tortured sentence in one important respect: it works as well as we can make it work right now. Mitch Henry gave me revision after revision of his essay "Caribbean Summer" right up until we had it typeset, when he finally had to abandon it. A tuned-up version of Mary Littlejohn Belser's poem "Echophobia" arrived by University Mail seconds before all such substitutions became impossible. Ann Amacher patiently typed out rewrites of her essay about Auburn's water supply while this inexperienced editor tried to explain what he wanted it to accomplish for the magazine. Even our University's alumni Writer in Residence R.T. Smith had pencilled in revisions and spelling corrections on his typewritten manuscript of "In Lieu of Song," which even without the polishing shined more brightly than any other piece in the magazine. So please read the offerings here for what they are: abandoned, not finished. These are action shots, not still life.

We promise if you read anything in this issue of *The Circle* with attention to what the author is attempting, you will learn. Even the poetry. Especially the poetry. Most

Auburn students care about the issues in these poems—that's why we chose these few, honest poems about children, about families, about the environment, about human rights.

The Circle always can use more opinions so that we can more accurately judge what students here appreciate in a student magazine. The Circle is the only magazine funded by Auburn University student activity fees; you have the liberty to walk into the new Circle office in the Glomerata suite and help select what will and will not appear in the next issue of *The Circle*. Anyone can do it. You get to evaluate specific essays and stories, specific poems, or write your own if you want to improve the selection. You pay for more than reading the magazine, and we hope you will take advantage of more.



David Wimberley, editor, for the entire staff and editorial boards of *The Circle*

Cover Art by Peter Vickers

The Circle

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The Circle, financed by student activity fees, serves as a forum for the writers and artists within the university community. It aims to appeal to a diverse Auburn audience by providing a variety of articles, essays, short stories, art and photography. The views expressed throughout the issue are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the publisher (the Board of Student Communications) or those of the *The Circle* staff or editorial board.

The Circle

Volume 14, Number 1

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Job Description: Cinderella

Jenny Jackson discusses her role as Miss Alabama

by Jenny Jackson

with Sumarie Bass

When I was crowned Miss Auburn University, well, that was all. I wasn't thinking about going to Miss Alabama, and I wasn't thinking about going on to the Miss America Pageant, but I was standing on that stage and Nora Chapman, the executive director of the Miss Alabama Pageant, came up to me and was already telling me, "Keep the weekend of Mother's Day open," and all this stuff, all this work I had to do. I just stood there thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?"

Having grown up in Virginia, I never heard much about Miss Virginia or any of the Miss America preliminaries. I always watched Miss America as a little girl and told myself, "Yeh, I could do that some day," but I never really seriously considered it. When I entered Auburn University, I saw how important it was to so many girls in Alabama, and some of them started when they were four or five years old, but I never thought it was something I really wanted to do.

I was very competitive in track in high school; I was state champ my junior year. At Auburn I high jumped for two years until I was injured. I think that a lot of the competitiveness through an individual sport such as track and field and in a conference like the SEC taught me the importance of competing with myself. I realized that I can do anything, but it's up to me. That's a saying that my Dad and I have always used: "If it is to be, it's up to me." I learned to rely on myself and not depend so much on others.

I entered the Miss Auburn University Pageant for a lot of reasons. I missed the competitiveness of track, and most of all I missed performing on the piano. I had taken lessons from when I was five years old until I was 19, for 14 years. I

was going to pursue a career in music, but my last year of high school I began to doubt that was what I wanted. My teacher did not give me the positive reinforcement and encouragement I needed to prepare me for a higher education in music. I started to dread my lessons every day. I decided I didn't want it to continue that way. I would enjoy playing the piano as a hobby for the rest of my life, but I certainly didn't want to hate it.

I guess there just came a time before the Miss Auburn University Pageant last year when I had been thinking about it, but I guess just on a whim I decided I was going to

join, and I turned the application in on the last day. Also, I noticed the one-year tuition available to the winner and the two-quarter and one-quarter tuition for the first and second runners-up. I was tired of calling my Dad for money every month, almost every week, and it would have been great for me to tell him that I could pay for my last year of school.

When I won Miss Auburn University, after the next couple of days when it had sunk in, I realized that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for scholarship money, career advancement, and just opportunities to perform and to grow as



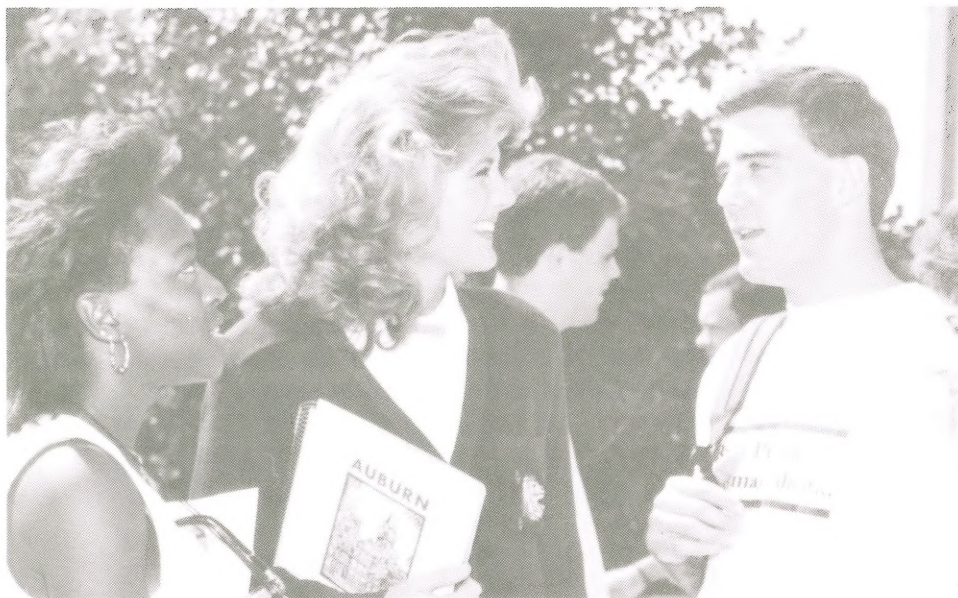
a person. I decided I was going to give it everything I had, and that's where the experience from track came in as far as giving 110% in everything.

For the next three or four months until the Miss Alabama Pageant, I kept up with current events. I exercised every day, watched what I ate, and developed a totally different piano piece for my talent. I put together a medley of southern songs and basically spent most of my time working on that, plus I was working and going to school.

Well, I ended up winning Miss Alabama, and right after that Nora Chapman and I got together. All summer I worked on a new piano piece, the Warsaw Concerto. I made appearances, worked on my speaking ability, exercised every day at six o'clock in the morning, studied for interviews, and did mock interviews with the Birmingham News editorial staff. We worked as hard as we could all summer. I tried to give 110%. When Nora and I got on the plane for Atlantic City at the Birmingham Airport, I said, "Nora, we've done everything we can. Now we're just going to have fun." And that's what we did.

The best part of all was being able to perform on center stage at Convention Hall in front of thousands of people live plus on national television. Just to be there I felt like a winner. Then, to have placed as fourth runner-up was just icing on the cake. I really don't think it's hit me. In fact, it hasn't really hit me that I won Miss Alabama. I hope I don't go through life waiting for it to hit me.

Now that the Miss America Pageant is over and I'm back on campus, I am under contract, and there are certain rules and regulations that I have to follow. Some people say, "It sounds like you're in the Army," but it's only for my own good. It's not to keep me in control; it's to watch out for me. It protects me from the press and demands respect for the position of Miss Alabama. The experiences and opportunities far outweigh any negative aspects of the rules.



I won a \$10,000 wardrobe from Parisian, and I am required to wear these clothes anytime I'm in public. That's why I'm dressed unlike the typical Auburn student on campus. All my outfits are skirts and heels. On my off days, I wear very little makeup. I don't roll my hair. I wear sweats and watch TV or wash the car. If I had my choice, I'd still be wearing jeans and sweat pants on campus. I wouldn't roll my hair, and I wouldn't be wearing lipstick, but that just goes with the job. I'm under contract, and Miss Alabama is a job like any other.

I won't be able to do anything with War Eagle Girls and Plainsmen; they had to pick someone to take my place, since I have obligations for every Saturday this fall. They did order me a uniform, which really meant a lot to me. I've wanted to be a War Eagle Girl since I first came to Auburn and was honored that I was selected to be one. Miss Alabama was something that came along later.

There are certain rules in my contract as Miss Alabama that I've agreed to follow. I won't date for a year, but I really won't have time anyway. I won't be seen at bars, or at a restaurant at a table with anyone who's drinking, or at fraternity houses. I won't go to socials or really anything with my sorority, but I really don't have time. I'll be involved with Miss Alabama preliminary pageants emceeing and performing. I have a lot of different

speaking engagements; I speak on goal-setting, and I also work with fund-raisers. I have a car for use as Miss Alabama, but I can't drive it without my chaperone.

In my free time I'm going to study and try to graduate this year. I'm majoring in marketing. I have 21 more hours, and I'm trying to get ten of them behind me this quarter, even though I'll be traveling a lot and have to miss class for different public appearances.

Some of my most rewarding experiences are when I'm in public working with underprivileged children or even just signing autographs. I'd rather stay there an extra hour and fulfill everyone's autograph requests than send anybody away, because that person may have come out just to get Miss Alabama's autograph. The experiences with people are the ones you never can exchange, just knowing that you've brightened somebody's day.

A man from an island in the Pacific that has its own monarchy came up and asked my chaperone how he should properly address me. Was it "Your Majesty" or "Your Highness?" I said, "Oh no, just Jenny." Children sometimes come up and ask me if I sleep with my crown on. It's touching and it's kind of amusing, but it's those times I'll never forget when they look at me then turn to their mother and say, "This is Cinderella."

In Lieu of Song

He came to fish, and fell into poetry.

by R. T. Smith

It's astonishing how often even an obscure poet is asked how he came to his vocation. I used to struggle with the queries extemporaneously each time I was asked, and I seemed able to supply some tentative answer only in a social context. Usually I'd elude the question by citing the story of the boy who was saved from drowning by a bystander who asked, "How did you come to fall in?" To which the boy replied, "I didn't come to fall in; I came to fish." I used to say that I just came to fish and fell into poetry. Clearly my motives are not so interesting as those of Shaherezade, Little Tommy Tucker or Robert Lowell. The answer seemed to satisfy or parry most people. In the cool hours of contemplation, however, it was a question I avoided as self-conscious and unproductive, shackling.

About a year ago, that altered. The issue acquired an urgency I couldn't explain, could only sense instinctively, and I began to interrogate myself. The still-evolving answer I have come to contains some elements of fairly literal autobiography and a portion of metaphor. As a child I loved stories with their lullabies, rhetoric, ravings and secrets, but I was much more enchanted by music, which I always wanted to enter and occupy. The Baldwin in the parlor, my father's idle violin. Unfortunately, I have a tainted ear that leaves me feeling like an intruder, a brute in the jewelry shop. So I chose stories instead. And sports and movie-going and beer and so on.

I chose stories and wrote them, but the choice didn't last. Next I

took my need for enchantment to the little theater stage, where I learned about another music, one we're all creating and responding to in more or less conscious ways—the music of spoken language, which is not exactly a matter of pitch and duration, but of echo and intervals, the nails and snags of vowels and consonants. And meaning, not separate from the music, but as an element of it, however masked or muted. I fell in love with the cycle of seeing and saying and re-seeing, and I began to compose my own brief dramas, attempts to articulate that moved relentlessly from image to metaphor. I discovered snakes hatching and wrote about them. I watched my grandmother tatting lace and described the act in a way meant to suggest, without naming, the bonds between her and my grandfather. Not that I wasn't already suggesting ideas, but I was finding my internal weather exclusively in the rural environment and celebrating the parallels. I was making artifacts and personal totems from and for the will to believe, but the vehicles themselves, the ostensible "subject matter," encouraged readers to dwell on the "plot" and "character" surfaces of the poems.

It's reasonable to comment here on the lack of organized literary study involved in the process so far. I've always devoured books—history, novels, travel—but I was no English major, and I added contemporary poets like Dickey, Merwin and Kinnell reluctantly at first. My formal raid on literature followed the decision to be a poet, and probably that order is as normal as any.

It's been by turns amusing and irritating that some readers who saw

me as a reporter of evocative Southern scenes a dozen years ago still believe I am or should be operating that way, but as I learn more about how the dance of language weaves what we call "the real," and unweaves it at the same time, as well as naming it, describing it, taunting it and underwriting it, I become less direct. Or my indirections have become more important to me. I draw less, paint more, let the tides and undertow find their own way through me. Maybe I've become a kind of scumbling expressionist not quite abandoning the paraphernalia of "Southernness"—after all, it supplies most of the local habitations and names I know—but trying to explore the spaces between the notes of language.

*I've always devoured
books--history,
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major.*

In graduate school I was exposed to the jargon of literary analysis, which is handy but not essential, and the term *kunstlerroman* turned on a wry light inside me. I didn't fan it often, but there it was, a word suggesting the life of an artist, a term frequently applied to a novel like Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, which concentrates Stephen's early years, the grist-making. Last year when my origins as a poet began to occupy my mind's center of gravity, I decided, enjoying the irony of

suggesting a genre and method I really had no intention of delivering, to call the piece on that "subject" "Kunstleroman."

KUNSTLEROMAN

At six I fell from a pasture oak and
went silent for a day,
while an eye opened inside me like
a seed.

It was that simple.
Later I peed on the live wire
of a horse fence and scorched that
other eye
the seeds yearn to burst from.
I couldn't muster a scream.
In a milkweed meadow
a woman wild in the saddle
whispered in tune with the evening
cicadas,
and her roan hair tossed like a
wind-ripped blossom.

That too.
Now I close my eyes around
memory's mote
and hide in the husks
abandoned by words as they flee.

I won't try to interpret or gloss this palimpsest closely because I suspect a poet can earn a warm seat in hell by wrenching his own work into paraphrase, but I will point out that the equestrian trope, the plant imagery, the erotic overtones and the optical images are, after a host of revisions, orchestrated with the closest thing to intention I can "muster." The sense of violence in this precis, as well as the odd matter-

How much of this poem is autobiography honed to metaphor and how much is artifice or misremembering I won't elaborate, partly because much of the imagination's territory lies unmapped. I did fall from that tree, and I don't believe I have to remember if the descent was like flying in order to embrace the consequences, for an elusive music keeps happening in that fall and simple silence. *Felix culpa.*

*The other question people ask
persistently is: who do you write
for? That's easier to answer:
for anyone who needs it.*

of-fact tone and coarse directness that intrude on the rhetorical gestures, are "intended." So is the suggestion of the Delphic oracle, which Virgil describes as a priestess riding an unmastered stallion. The sibyl herself always spoke in cryptic but fathomable terms, and I hope this little package contains an interplay of sly insinuation and seriousness, some shades of chiaroscuro, a few tones that might live where songs do, between the whisper and the scream.

Although that last stanza doesn't explicitly endorse much discipline, I do work for distance and control, while refusing to accept the illusion Alice's friend Humpty Dumpty nourishes when he says it's all a matter of who's to be the boss, the speaker or the words. No one absolutely masters the language, but we train and practice to direct where we can and accept the inevitable accidents, hoping they'll be constructive, coaxing them in that direction.

The other question people ask persistently is: who do you write for? That's easier to answer: for anyone who needs it. Some of the experiences and perceptions I stumble onto demand to be brought out of confusion and into some livable form. Maybe other people want some of the same raw matter and energy shaped. Maybe they recognize a confusion or attraction they were headed for. With a little information (not biographical in nature), a little relaxation and an eye for the implied, most any adult can grasp the tone and direction of a poem like "Kunstleroman." To make the quieter connections, one must need them. Those who do are welcome to what I compose instead of concertos and symphonies, and for those who don't share my brand of curiosity, I can only echo novelist Harry Crews, who advises: try not to think about it. After all, silence is a formidable element of music too.



David W. Turner, esq.
Dumpster

Ecophobia

Summer of 88

These storms and earthquakes...
the earth repeatedly raped,
deadly seed with a half life in centuries
thrust deep into her womb,
her skies cry acid rain. Beyond the atmosphere
two thousand tons of space trash endlessly orbits.
Flourocarbons penetrate
right through the ozone layer.

Sickened, her fevers mount
the record heat
 melting the polar ice.
Her blood tides, her ocean heart, her river veins
flow poisonous with waste.

 Till she has had enough
and like a fly-tormented horse
shivers her skin,
shudders man off.

by Mary Littlejohn

What are you drinking?

Sputtering over Auburn's Water Supply

by Anne Amacher

"A new price of our American standard of living is our imprisonment in the present . . . We sputter against the Polluted Environment . . . We forget that even if the water in many cities today is not as spring-pure nor as palatable as we would like, still for most of history the water of the cities (and of the countryside) was undrinkable."

—Daniel J. Boorstin, former Librarian of Congress

Despite the admonition of Mr. Boorstin, I take this opportunity to sputter, not against the Polluted Environment, but against those who imply that we can be complacent about protecting our drinking water against contamination. Certainly modern technology has had remarkable success in eliminating from drinking water many nuisance- or disease-causing bacteria, viruses and parasites. But, even so, regulators must be doubly careful to protect our drinking water: not only do we face the ever-present potential threat of the same old biological contaminants, but modern industrial technology is creating and disseminating literally thousands of synthetic substances which we consumers use and which are discarded in ways that may pollute water sources. For examples of each, we have no farther to travel than Lake Ogletree, Auburn's source of drinking water. Although both of the episodes I will relate began back in the 1970's, neither episode is "over."

The Uniroyal Episode

In 1972 after attending a Girl Scout environmental workshop in Green Bay, Wisconsin, two Auburn ninth-graders—a Girl Scout and a Boy Scout—initiated a tour of the watershed of Lake Ogletree. The tour brought to public attention for

the first time the fact that a spill of fuel oil from the Uniroyal Tire Plant in Opelika had killed a lot of fish in a private lake upstream from the Lake Ogletree drinking water reservoir. Uniroyal had settled the matter with the private lake's owner; no one could find any records indicating that the incident had been reported to Alabama water authorities or to the Auburn Water Works.

For the first time Auburn citizens began to raise questions publicly about Uniroyal's permit to discharge its process effluent into a tributary of Chewacla Creek, which feeds Lake Ogletree, source of Auburn's water supply. They discovered that Uniroyal's permit did not require monitoring the process effluents or the blowdown from the cooling tower for the possible presence of toxic chemicals. A one-time test found traces of two highly toxic compounds—trichlorophenol and isophorone—in Uniroyal's wastewater, something which seemed to surprise Uniroyal officials both locally and in their home office in Connecticut.

A test found traces of two highly toxic compounds.

To the astonishment and gratification of Auburn citizens, Uniroyal volunteered to shift its effluent discharge from Chewacla Creek to Little Uchee Creek, a stream which was not used for public drinking water. This provision was later incorporated into Uniroyal's new permit; however, not until 1986 did the permit require bioassays to detect possible toxicity.

In September and October, 1988, an official of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) confirmed that some

bioassays had shown Uniroyal's effluent to be toxic to aquatic creatures. Uniroyal must now implement a plan to prevent toxic effluents from being discharged into Little Uchee Creek, which is classified for Fish and Wildlife. Auburn citizens can be especially glad that in 1976 Uniroyal's effluent was diverted from Auburn's principal water source, since Uniroyal's permit still allows the discharge of specified amounts of oil and grease—an average of 11.2 pounds per day. Gary Hutchinson, while Chief for Public Water Supply, EPA Region IV, wrote in October of 1973, "information concerning the effect of chronic, long-term exposure to low-level petroleum contamination is not fully documented at this time," but "chlorination [a standard disinfection procedure] of certain petroleum products is thought to at least present the possibility for creating hydrocarbons which may be potentially more harmful than petroleum."

Uniroyal was sensitive to the concerns of Auburn citizens—it voluntarily agreed to divert its effluent from the Lake Ogletree watershed. This past October after learning the results of bioassays which recent regulations require, it moved to formulate a toxicity reduction plan. But that doesn't mean citizens and regulators should stop watching. Even though since 1976 the fish in Little Uchee Creek, rather than Auburn's drinking water source, have been the recipients of Uniroyal effluents, Auburn citizens should still take an interest in what toxicity reduction plan Uniroyal implements.

And there is another problem still present in the watershed of Auburn's drinking water reservoir—a problem where "voluntary action" has not been in evidence. It is a longstanding problem about which citizens and regulators have

recently again had reason to "sputter":

Chewacla Creek: 260 Pounds of Manure Per Day

In 1974, Auburn citizens experienced an extended period of unpleasant earthy odor and taste in their water. The Auburn Water Works Board contracted Auburn University to "investigate the chemical, biological and environmental" factors responsible for the odor. The Auburn University researchers concluded that the principal source of Auburn's problem was probably an oily substance, geosmin, produced under certain environmental conditions at certain stages in the life cycle of actinomycetes, a kind of bacteria.

In the course of the investigation, the University researchers identified a sharp increase in numbers of fecal coliform bacteria below a private dairy farm along Chewacla Creek. "This fecal contamination indicates that materials representing potential nutrients for odor-producing microorganisms are being put into the water supply," they reported. This fecal contamination (manure and urine), they also noted, was "a cause for concern to public health."

The dairyman contended that washing some 260 pounds of manure a day from his barn into his lake, which drained continuously into Chewacla Creek, did not constitute pollution of the creek. But the Alabama Water Improvement Commission, citing the Auburn University research, maintained that "untreated waste, whether animal or human, constitutes pollution." The dairyman was ordered to construct a waste-treatment facility (a separate lagoon, or holding pond) for the washdown from the 144 cows in his barn.

The scary part is this: the dairyman also happened to be a state legislator, and in the 1979 legislative session he made a move to dissolve the AWIC through the "Sunset Law," which required a state agency to get an affirmative vote every four years to continue in existence. Upon

his recommendation, the Sunset Committee actually did propose the abolition of the board overseeing AWIC and recommended that its staff be placed under control of the governor's office. But cooler heads prompted the Sunset Committee to reverse its vote.

This past spring, a less severe case of earthy taste and odor again afflicted Auburn water. Sure enough—*deja vu*—cows were relieving themselves *ad libitum* in and around Chewacla Creek a few miles above Lake Ogletree. As I write on November 3, 1988, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management says the dairyman is appealing their order that his cows stop using the stream as their personal bathtub and commode.

Horizons

Because Auburn is relatively small and prosperous, because it has biologists, chemists, planners and engineers on its University faculty and Extension Service, and because it has a professional engineer and experienced personnel overseeing technical aspects of its water treatment system, our city is well situated to support technology and policies to protect its own drinking water and, indeed, to set an example for the country.

Sure enough, cows were relieving themselves in and around Chewacla Creek

A forward-looking proposal now on the table in Auburn city government: in September, 1987, the Auburn Planning commission unanimously approved a motion to undertake a "study of Watershed Management for the Lake Ogletree watershed with a goal of establishing standards which will protect Auburn's primary water source." This study, said the motion, "should include buffer zones, limits on commercial and industrial develop-

ment in the water shed, sediment controls and residential densities." The Planning Director has promised that the study will be done. Such a study could be enlightening for University students of city planning and land use, engineering, agriculture and dairy science, and forestry.

Examples of Auburn University faculty research which could aid in preventing contamination of drinking water:

—Enid Bittner and D. King (Geology) are investigating how geology influences groundwater and contaminant migration in the vicinity of Chemical Waste Management's toxic and hazardous waste facility at Emelle, Alabama.

—Charles E. Faupel (Sociology) and Conner Bailey (Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology) have studied emergency planning for disasters at locations such as Chemical Waste Management's Emelle facility. They have also looked at how local citizen power may be related to the siting of this toxic and hazardous waste facility—one of the four largest such commercial operations in the Southeast, all located in counties that are "largely black, poor, rural, and, overall, poorly educated."

—S. D. Worley and D. E. Williams (Chemistry) and L. J. Swango (Microbiology, School of Veterinary Medicine) have been developing and testing a new disinfectant to replace chlorine, which is currently the most widely used drinking water disinfectant. An alternative disinfectant is needed because free chlorine has the disadvantage of sometimes combining with organic material to create toxic compounds (trihalomethanes) such as chloroform.

A Challenge to Auburn University Students

University students, like everyone else, can contribute to environmental protection.

You can work through the Auburn University Environmental Awareness Organization and the City of Auburn's recycling program to see that every piece of recyclable paper, every aluminum can and every glass container used by Auburn students is recycled. (Recycling can reduce pollution of air, land, and water.)

You can attend Auburn Planning Commission meetings to learn what such bodies do to prevent water pollution. You can prepare yourselves to write governmental regulations free of bureaucratese. You can push the trend toward "sustainable" agriculture and forestry—a trend which aims to reduce pesticide

use and prevent soil erosion and siltation. You can research ways to reduce problems created by consumer habits, population growth and careless land use. You can follow the dictum, "Know thyself," asking "What am I—and people like me—doing that puts the drinking water of the future at risk?"

Watching the regulators of drinking water for the past 16 years has been habit-forming. At age 65 I am ready to bequeath my addiction to younger and more knowledgeable heads. To that end I will offer to deposit an extensive file of documents, newspaper clippings, and cassette tapes in the archives of Ralph Draughon Library with the hope that some Auburn University students may use them.

For answers about drinking water regulation:

General information on EPA regulations:

call EPA Drinking Water Hotline
1+800+426-4791

Alabama's enforcement of drinking water standards:

write Catherine Lamar, Public Information Officer
Alabama Department of Environmental Management
1751 Federal Drive
Montgomery, AL 36130
or call her at 1271-7709.

Auburn's drinking water:

Monitoring reports are available to the public from the office of Rex Griffin, City Engineer and Manager of the Auburn Water Works Board, City Hall, North Ross Street.



Susan L. Bogle

Taken By a Dream

As I slept in the velvet gray
Of dreaming, where tastes of thought
Pooled into imaginings
Colored like rainbows
In parking lot puddles,
He came through the window—
From that liquid night
He came into my bedroom,
Into my dream.

I tried to touch his arm,
Cloaked in silk that flowed
Melted mother of pearl.
My hand was too real
And could not grasp
The shimmering folds.

I knew he was not
Of my dream.
He was a color imagining,
Come to me of himself.
We talked a while.
Out of blue and white china
We drank steaming tea.

I sleep on,
Soft in my nakedness . . .
Taken by a dream.

by JoLee Gibbons



Alan Eskew

Caribbean Summer

A young missionary rides out the storm in Jamaica

by Mitch Henry

Hope welled out of Issabelle Thomas' dim eyes, ran down the thin furrows of her black leathery cheek and disappeared into the collar of her torn blouse. "Nothing left ... nothing ..." Her broken voice haunts me, the image of her thin trembling body as she surveyed the pile of splintered lumber that had been her home for decades grips my mind and won't let go. Sometimes that helplessness I felt standing in front of the rusty, bent piece of tin that formed the gate to her scanty rain-soaked yard tries to suffocate me like the humidity of that day. I try not to let the emotions overwhelm me; I don't know why I repress them. I did all I could; I gave her what money I could, I prayed with her, and since I got back I have spent long hours and all the money I can spare trying to get relief to Jamaica. But nothing makes the feeling go away—the feeling that I should have stayed, that I should have done something more. The thought of that poor elderly widow, alone with no family and often hungry, rips my soul worse than Gilbert's winds ripped her house.

I try to keep myself busy now to stop the remembering.

I'm in the Haley Center computer lab listening with one ear to a lecture about getting the mainframe to run dittos for my graduate school needs, but my mind has a more pressing need—to make sense of a bizarre September, to retrace, to resolve, to relieve, to re-live the tension of the most significant days of my life.

Wednesday, August 31: Where was I? Oh yeah, I was supposed to graduate from Auburn that day. I did. All my family was there; they found someone else to milk the cows, so all my brothers could come. My girlfriend's parents met mine for

the first time. They hit it off at the Golden Corral at lunch like old school mates, laughing, telling corny jokes and stories that everyone chuckled at politely. Rhonda and I were glad.

Mama didn't want me to go to Jamaica the next morning. The parting late that afternoon wasn't as tearful as last year's, but that was only because we said good-bye in public. It was a two-week sort of good-bye, but Gilbert wanted me to stay away longer, and he was bigger than me; so I had to oblige him.

Twelve days later I heard Mama cry again the next time we said good bye:

"Hello, Mama... Hey Daddy. I guess y'all heard about the storm... yeah, we heard about it late yesterday afternoon... No ma'am, we're gonna stay here in Oracabessa at the villa; it's the safest place we can find. It's got reinforced concrete walls and there's a steep cliff down to the water... No Daddy, I heard the hurricane's gonna hit on the other side of the island first near Kingston. Ma'am?... We'll be all right here. I'll call you just as soon as we can get a line out; it'll probably be Tuesday night or Wednesday morning... What's that Daddy?... Oh, find something and hold on, hmmph, yeah, I will. Y'all just keep us in your prayers, and I'm not gonna tell you not to worry; I know you will... Ma'am?... Yes Ma'am, I'll take care..... I love y'all... Bye-bye."

My heart sank before I could get the receiver back to the phone on the dingy antique desk in Louis Cousin's dark, powerless living room. Was it the last time I would talk to them? I could tell they weren't giving me the whole picture on Gilbert for my sake.

I had to try to get through to Port Antonio one more time. I had to talk to Rhonda before the storm

hit. I dialed for an operator and let it keep ringing. My mind wandered back two days to Saturday in the straw market in Port Antonio, behind a dirty canvas lean-to where they were selling yams, the bay behind us separated by a chain link fence, garbage piled against it reeking of dead fish. I held her as she cried, warm tears soaking through my cotton shirt and her small body trembling, "I'm so tired of this place, I want to go home... We walk for hours in the heat up hills in mud to get to a Bible study, and they aren't there... It's so hard. I haven't cried or anything since we got here... I'm sorry, I know you think I'm a wimp; we haven't seen each other in a week, and the first thing I do when I see you is cry..."

I didn't want to think about leaving her that evening. I cursed the circumstances that had us doing our mission work in different parts of the Island. Only the promise of the next four hours with her kept me from despairing.

I told her I had something for her in her room at the Demontevin, and I held her, promising her that things would get better. They did.

In the leaky, musty, third-floor room of the 19th-Century lodge, we stumbled over several pieces of her roommates' luggage before we found the flowers on the third bed in the corner where I had left them. They were starting to droop. I took the string from the stems, pocketing it as I had planned, and suggested she put the red blooms in water. I told her not to read the note until I said she could. As we walked narrow streets looking for my friends I had taught and baptized the year before, I could tell her energy was sapped—she was sick; so was I.

We found ourselves waiting at the dock for the shuttle boat to Navy Island where we would eat supper.

Errol Flynn used to own the rock and built a resort on it—it was too expensive to lodge there, but just reasonable enough for our low-budget mission group from Auburn to eat some hot mackerel and red beans and rice on the beach at sunset.

She held on to the letter, and after supper I knew it was time; I knew it was the place. I led her away from but not out of the view of the rest of the group, and asked her to take her shoes off and bring the letter. I rolled my white cotton trousers up above my knees—the sand clung to my toes. Her pink skirt brushed my bare legs and got wet on the edges as we splashed the salt water. I asked her to read the note aloud. The world disappeared as her voice enlivened the words I had struggled to write. “....my love for you demands me ask one question.” When her blue eyes left the paper and met mine, my soul stirred, my heart pounded, my mind said speak, and my lips parted. “Rhonda, will you marry me?...” “Yes,” and the warm tears soaked through my cotton shirt again. I tied the white string around her finger. Within an hour I was bouncing along the coast road in the back seat of a mini-van bound for the villa in Oracabessa. I knew we would be flying over Cuba Thursday morning talking about how many bridesmaids to have and which nephew to use as ring bearer. I didn’t quit smiling until my head hit my pillow on the floor of the villa.

When I heard the operator answer, I wasn’t smiling. I glanced at my watch; it had taken her 25 minutes to answer the line. “I want to place a call to the Demontevin Lodge in Port Antonio.” She replied, “One moment, I’ll try again.” Eternity came and went and my heart sank deeper in despair when she came back on the line and said, “I’m sorry, the circuits are no longer working into Portland province; no one can get through.”

Gilbert had cut us off from each other.

I couldn’t cry; there was too much

to think about, too much to do—we had to ready the villa for the wind, we had to stock our rooms with food and water, we had to steel our minds to deal with the challenges and uncertainties that increased in intensity steadily with the pounding vibrations of the waves slamming into the coral and pumice at the base of the cliff. We had to prepare our souls because we knew the tide could surge over us, the winds could flatten us, a tornado could scatter us. There could be no tomorrow.



Running sideways down the driveway to keep my balance in the wind, I got to the villa, where Tim and Clay had already taped the windows. In a few minutes, ten Auburn students, a middle-aged housewife from Tennessee, a preacher from Lanett, Alabama, a female game warden from Mississippi, and a forty-year-old black businessman from Dothan held hands in a circle in a darkening room listening to the wind increase its pitch as it shot through the horizontal wood shutters facing the water; only one gravelly but soothing old voice broke through the din. Hap, a retired coal miner from Jasper,

Alabama prayed, “...Holy Father we thank thee for the opportunity to experience hardship as your children...”

Hardship. Suffering. I had said the words with such vehemence and conviction the day before. That morning I stood in a makeshift pulpit inside a soiled white canvass tent viewing pews jammed full of faces young and old on the left side, but empty on the right side except for the dog that wandered between

the unvarnished two-by-four benches. In mountain villages the farmers work in the daylight, even on Sunday; the 300-plus crowds of the nightly Bible school and revival were scattered over the mountains and in the bush.

But the morning crowd did not disappoint me; the faces I saw looked back with enthusiasm as I said, “I want to persuade you to suffer persecution for Jesus Christ!” I forced the words up from my spirit and let them linger in the tent as the first crisp morning winds of Gilbert scraped the canvas flap against the gravel behind me.

I knew nothing of the Hurricane.

The anticipation of our departure on Thursday glowed dimly in the recesses of my mind as I delivered the lesson I had prayed over, had struggled to organize; the lesson I hoped these people would remember every day they walked out of their house after we left.

Hardship. Suffering. I had said the words with such vehemence the day before.

How could I ask them to suffer? Life is hard enough for the people anyway. Many I spoke to, though, knew that suffering for a reason was better than suffering for no purpose at all.

I knew they would suffer because Anthony McDurmott is my friend. Anthony's nickname is Dumplin; he's short, not more than 5'2", dark, thin, muscular. At age sixteen, he was well liked by the locals. But two days before I preached this sermon, Anthony walked with us to the river to his baptism—his acquaintances and even his relatives ridiculing him and scorning him. I heard him tell his uncle, "No you don't understand. I'm not making a mistake. I have to do this because it's what the Bible says."

I held a towel while I watched Dumplin being baptized in the stream of a cold spring. Two undernourished dairy cows munched apathetically on the thick watergrass nearby while Anthony's teenage friends laughed and pointed. It was up to me to lead the Americans and a few of the Jamaican brethren as we sang, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." We prayed, I shook Anthony's hand, and we began the steep climb up the hill. When I asked him what the people had been saying about him, he told me, "They tell me I cannot make it."

I privately wondered how could the farmers, the children, the women who had shown such a natural beauty by opening up their homes and showering us with gifts—bana-

nas, coconuts, nutmeg, peppermint, and coffee—how could they turn instantly, violently to ridicule one of their own and thereby insult us?

"What do you think?" I asked Anthony.

He smiled and said, "I know I will make it."

I've spent enough time in Jamaica to know that the derision won't stop; yet Anthony made the choice to suffer because he loved something beyond himself, something his friends who had smoked ganja with him three weeks before thought was foolish, something his girlfriend in Fort George who he would no longer sleep with would not understand or respect. Anthony chose the grace of God. I had to respect him. He found happiness in what appeared to be a social disaster.

I heard Hap's voice again, "...and Father, we pray your blessings on the Church and our brothers and sisters at Benbow..." Benbow. Benbow.

BENBOW. Like a specter, a mystery, an unseen nightmare that does not frighten but lures. Like Bali Hai, the West in "go West young man," or Cortez's Montezuma. One word had been offered to describe it before we left America—Rustic. Rustic.

Oh, how that adjective had been pondered, rolled across the minds and tongues of my friends, my brothers, my sisters, my family, their families, all who have an attachment to the word Benbow.

Rustic, I learned, is a desperate situation, a symptom of the poverty disease which plagues the island of Jamaica. Along the footpath up the hill from the spring where the cows watched Anthony, I met Rustic. I conducted a Bible study at her house, so Anthony went back to the tent with Amy, my study partner,

along with the rest of the Americans in the Toyota mini-van. Alone, I faced Rustic.

I watched her son Michael playing farmer in the dirt along the edges of a half-finished wooden skeleton of a shelter. His corn rows were reasonably straight for a three-year-old plowing in packed mud. Part of me wanted to watch him instead of study. Mucous ran down the edge of his lips. Rustic finally wiped it on her skirt when Michael interrupted our Bible study, running between us as we sat on the edge of the unfinished two-by-eight that framed one wall of the wood skeleton. Grabbing his mother's study book and then her soiled blouse, he climbed playfully into her large lap, looking at me inquisitively. I saw him mouth the word, "white - ee," and then jump and run off to hide under the corner of Rustic's one-room shack, peering bashfully from behind the weeds only long enough to catch my glance and laugh at the thrill.

Rustic had a man. He sent money and only came to visit when he had "the need." I asked her if she loved him; she said no. After we studied the Bible, Rustic looked at me and said she wanted to be baptized and become a Christian. I asked her if she would do so that day, and I knew the answer before her lips parted; each time I hear the response it tears my soul. "I can't leave my man."

I reasoned with Rustic for thirty minutes more. Her light countenance reflected the pain of her situation—no way to win, no way to get a job to work and support Michael or her aging parents, no way to marry a man who was unwilling to marry. She could live in the situation she knew was immoral and survive, wrestling with guilt and remorse but at least eating. Or she could leave the man, become a Christian and face the uncertainty of finding the next meal. God and I were asking this woman to risk starvation. The intensity of the moment flooded over me; I knew she wouldn't starve, the Church

would take care of her needs, but no words persuaded her. The woman's real name was Cathlene Henry.

Cathlene Henry had a man.

Alone along the long muddy road back to the tent, a feeling possessed me. I wrote in my journal:

God. I'm frustrated. Cathlene. God I hate it, I'm struggling Father, I cannot understand, when I left I looked at the hills — they looked evil. I said to myself, "Satan is here," I heard him laugh — I said, "No, God will keep me."

I am in Satan's land now; no, I never left it — such darkness in Paradise.

This dilemma I cannot handle alone.

I felt a wet almond leaf cling to my forearm after it blew through the window slats in the villa. I brushed it off without letting go of anyone's hand and then refocused on Hap's words.

"...and Father thank you for blessing us with this place to weather the storm..."

Oh, what a blessing. The villa was not a Holiday Inn, but it exceeded any of our expectations. We were told that we would be staying in Guy's Hill near Benbow in the mountains. We would have to sleep on the floor, eat native food, and have running water every other day if the electricity was on and the well was working. These accommodations fell through at the last minute and the only place we could find quickly was twenty-seven miles from Benbow in Oracabessa along the north coast—about a one-hour and 15-minute drive on steep twisting mountain roads that made everyone carsick and nearly cost us our lives, when at several points we confronted two-ton dump-trucks. The trip did cost the lives of several chickens, a dog and a goat. I didn't mind that I still had to sleep on the floor, but it and the long drive were a reasonable exchange for the beauty of the spot at the top of the cliff where I chose to write in my journal early one morning before we left for Benbow:

Small boats in a sea of aqua, waves crashing on the coral reef gently, the horn of an omnibus saying "pardon me," probably passing the goat that woke me, tropical breeze lapping the ridges of my ear like the water lapping the edge of shore, Hap's voice rough but consistently soothing, smiling, Father watching me write — recording.

A shovel scrapes gravel as men build a new villa. Rock Edge Villa in Oracabessa. Fidel Castro stayed here, I wonder if he used an air mattress also?

The sun breaks over the ridge of cumulus and warms my south Alabama tanned arms and face. My white legs are hidden in my Levi's.

Only in dreams, I thought last night, could I be blessed enough to enjoy a creation of God like this scene; but as I sit here on this rock wall, the sounds and the sight, yes the reality of this environment warms the outer edge of my being like the tropical sun warms my skin — only God can warm my innermost parts.

Two old men in a green boat row past; the one in the front is rowing mostly, the one behind steering mostly.

The sun unmask a scattering of buoys marking crab cages, the orange boats patiently tend them. Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, Ian Fleming, — you gentlemen should envy me. It is my time now, God has given me the youth, the eyes to see the sun strike the waters of the Caribbean and heat the neon sand between the dark coral monuments.

This spot knew Ian Fleming, now it knows me.

had written about; yet I wasn't sad. What nature destroys, nature will restore. My concern, like Hap's, was with those who were worried about us.

For hours after Hap said "Amen," I played out "what if" scenarios in my mind. What if Rhonda and all my friends in Port Antonio are killed; how will we all deal with that? What if someone I studied with in Benbow is killed; how will I deal with that? What if we are killed here; how will our parents deal with that?

Gilbert came, he possessed the room in the villa. I found comfort through the dark hours only by writing a letter to my mother. How could the paradise which had welcomed me with sunshine, calm tropical breezes, and cool nights, how could it turn now so violently to destroy me? Uncertainty occupied my mind as the storm engulfed the island.

Friday, September 15: I told Rhonda I wanted to talk to her at a special place. When we got there, she told me that during the storm, the students in Port Antonio got wet and stayed wet for two days working in the rain; her hair mildewed. Guilt troubled me as she spoke, telling me how they couldn't shower for four days and had to haul water from the ocean to flush their toilets; my villa in Oracabessa had running water every day. We sat on the ruins of

The people still answered "Not too bad," when you asked them how they were

"...and Lord please be with our families at home and those in Port Antonio who are worried about us..."

Hearing Hap's voice again thrust me into the present, and I knew the storm was destroying the beauty I

a party bungalow near the water in the dark. In the wake of the disaster, her smile warmed me, and the devastation around me disappeared as I leaned forward and gave her a soft kiss.

I was glad the two mission groups

had rendezvoused to organize the convoy for the airport in Kingston, because it allowed Rhonda and me to plan our lives together, and plan how we would reveal the news of our engagement to everyone while we sat together on that spot, out on a coral point that had been partially submerged and torn by Gilbert's tides. "Let's name our first son Gilbert..." I held on to a crevice as she tried to push me into the water.

Rhonda held my hand firmly as I told her how earlier that day the Benbow team had chanced the roads up to the wasted village and arrived to witness the destruction and do what we could. I couldn't find Anthony. I told her how Amy and I left our money, our clothes, and our addresses with the people who still answered, "Not too bad," when you asked them how they were. I tried not to get emotional as I told her how Amy and I left our tears at the doorstep of Issabelle Thomas.

There on the rock Rhonda and I prayed for our families at home while a lonely fisherman rowed by us in a long-boat with a lantern, pausing in the little inlet to throw

his net over a few stray fish in the darkness below him. His casual rowing made me wonder if I had imagined Gilbert. When he left, the lapping Caribbean, the stars, and the moonlight shimmering off the water kept us company. I read Rhonda the long overdue letter that I wrote to my mother during the most intense moments of the storm. I found out later that Mama had contacted the State Department, every Alabama Congressman, Governor Hunt's office, and CBS news, trying to find out if anyone knew whether we were alive or dead after the storm.

My folks never quit worrying until they heard my voice long distance from Miami on Saturday evening, three days later than we had been scheduled to get home:

"Hello Mama,...Hey Daddy. I'm in Miami. You don't know how good it is to hear your voice... I love ya'll too...."

I tried to think about their voices, but somewhere in a storm over south Georgia on the way to Hartsfield International the broken voice of Issabelle Thomas found me. "Nothing left...nothing..."

She still speaks to me.



Joel Ferrell

The Children

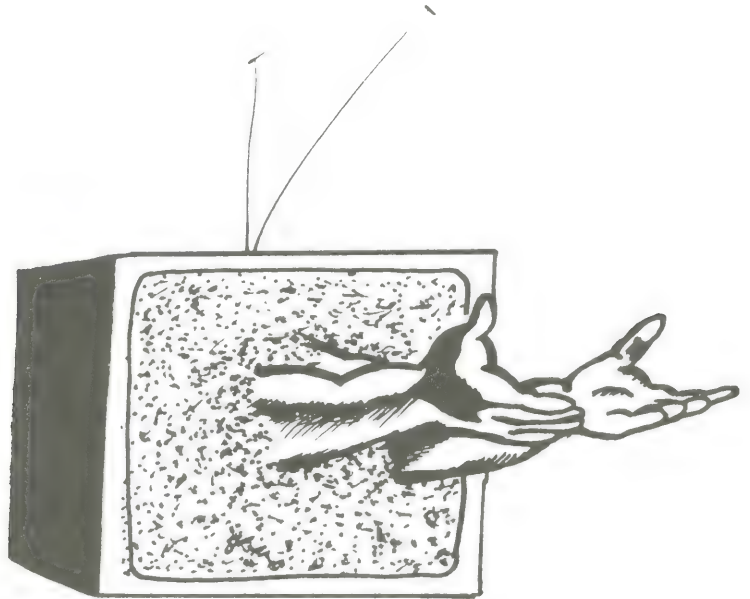
Late at night they shuffle into the blue glow
that lights my bedroom. I'm drifting off
to the lullaby of Rockford's charm, of Hitchcock's ironies,
and there they are:
heads and bellies swollen,
legs thin hoe handles and arms thinner.
Dark eyes stare through a drizzle of flies
while a white woman in a khaki jacket
tells me how easy it is to give.

I send checks but they're always there.
I skip channels but they always come back,
clambering with spidery hands
up from their huts, from their blistered fields,
down to the satellite beam right into my room.

There are so many of them.

Sometimes I turn them off,
let in the darkness that holds no voices
but the stammer of the clock.
Sometimes I tell myself
those eyes can't see me.
Sometimes I rub my hand
through the tingling fuzz of the screen
and they're not much bigger than my hand.

by Mr. Gail Regier



Alan Eskew

Socially Inept

by Thomas Traddles

They didn't hate Charles. After all, it was a Christian school, and the Bible says not to hate anyone, even if he is Catholic. They just didn't like him very well, didn't much enjoy his company.

Charles Tudd was short and soft. He had beady black eyes and coarse, black hair, wavy like a cheap home perm. He had no taste in dress. He was a military brat and an only child. He was mean and vulgar. I could never figure out if people like us had made him mean and vulgar, or if he had been born that way.

His name was perfect. If it hadn't been his real name, Kenny, who considered himself the class poet, would probably have invented it. Kenny always had it in for Charles.

One day at lunch Kenny proposed a question, ostensibly to the entire table. "What about the Papathy?" he said. Kenny had an effeminate lisp that always seemed to be getting worse.

When nobody replied, Kenny pursed his lips and grinned at Charles. "Tudd," he said, "you're Catholic. What do you thay about the Popthe one-man thircuth coming to New Orleanth? You got ticketth?"

Without looking up from his tray, Charles retorted, "Why don't you shut up, you flaming faggot."

Kenny looked from person to person around the table, saying, "Ooo . . ." as if he thought that was just the cutest joke in the world, as he would say.

Trying to take some of the heat off Charles, I said, "I think Charles is more from a Catholic family than a confirmed Catholic."

Charles turned on me. "What do you know, Richardson? Who made you God and Judge?"

"Nobody, I was just—"

"Catholics say the Pope is God and Judge," someone accused.

"Yeth, and thatth blathphemy. And the Bible theth blathphemerth are going to Hell."

Charles dropped a fork full of fruity green Jello back to his tray with a flat metal clatter and glared at Kenny. "Why don't you to hell," he spat. Then he bused his tray with food still on it to the scrapers' window and bobbed off to the restroom in his funny little gait.

When he had gone, I said to Kenny, "Why don't you let up a little."

"Me let up?" he said flippantly. "All I did wath athk him about the Pope. Did you hear him?"

"I heard him," said Melissa, who was quite put off by Charles' strong language. "He told you to go to hell, is what he said, and excuse my French." Anthony was laughing still. "Called you a flaming faggot!" Though he held Charles in high contempt because of his rudeness to the girls, Anthony sometimes snickered all day about his salvos at Kenny.

"Every day it's something," I muttered.

Kenny shrugged. "Don't tell uth, tell the Tudd—Mithter God and Judge."

I left the table in disgust. Since Charles had been shoved into our lives three months ago, I had been trying to work out some way he could enjoy at least a nodding acceptance in one of our cliques. I refused to admit that a sincere person, no matter how socially inept, couldn't find a niche somewhere in the class. But the guy was beyond socially inept; he constantly flung himself over the edge of social suicide. Those dizzy plunges always left me feeling betrayed and more than a little sick to my stomach, and pitying him more than ever.

I found him in the restroom lobby combing his hair with water from the tap. "I didn't mean anything a minute ago," I said. "I was only

trying to take some heat off you."

"I don't need you to take the heat off me, Richardson," he replied in an angry, even tone. "It was none of your damn business."

I wanted to turn around and walk out, and never bother myself about his miserable life again, but of course I could see that he was right, and told him so; and I actually apologized to him.

"You mean it?" he asked—he was forever suspicious. "Honest?"

"Yeah," I repeated. "I'm sorry, Charles."

Then almost abruptly he said, "Well forget it. You're a good friend, not like the rest of these slugs. I know you didn't mean it."

It was the first time I had ever heard Charles call anyone a friend, and hearing him say that gave me some hope for this pitiful little guy who at sixteen seemed to know nothing of shooting night baskets on a friend's driveway goal, or cruising in a crowded convertible with the radio blasting, or inhaling the dark clean scent of perfume and sweat straight from the warm skin of a girlfriend's neck.

The Friday night after the Pope and Blasphemy incident I left Melissa's at precisely twelve o'clock. I had made plans with Anthony to stop by his house and hear about his first date with this fabulous new blonde junior. Except for Mr. Neider's Mercedes, Anthony's driveway was empty, the basketball goal a stark silhouette in the bright pool of halogen. I waited until 12:15 and decided, somewhat piqued, that he and the blonde must be getting along just fine.

Having tucked Melissa in bed early, with much explaining about being tired and having an early morning at work, I couldn't return to her now. She would already be asleep. So would her father; a protective, difficult man, he liked me, and I wanted to keep it that way.

I was considering friends who might still be awake and inclined to some late night conversation when an unusual name occurred to me. It was unusual, first, because no one ever visited Charles for anything—he vanished from our collective consciousness between the closing and opening bells. It was unusual, second, because of what I wanted to talk about.

Charles answered my knock with a puzzled expression, and wearing baby blue pj's. I never would have guessed they made pajamas that had footies on them big enough for a sixteen-year-old, but Charles had a pair on.

I put on a smile. "Just dropped by to visit—I just left Melissa's," I said. "Too late?"

"No, no," he said, opening the door wide to a warm lamplit hall. "Come on in. I been watching HBO. You want some popcorn or anything?" We were walking through a functional, white-tiled kitchen towards the den, a dark, earth-toned room with a fireplace and lots of mahogany furniture. The vinyl soles of his footies whispered on the tile. "Got some Coke," he offered.

"Yeah. I am thirsty."

He poured me a glass and brought it to me in the den. He sat down in a chair to my right, next to a table on which another glass of Coke sat. He sipped from it. "So how's Melissa?" he said, and muted the sound on the TV.

"Great!" I drank deeply, and paused with a weak belch and a grin. "She's fantastic." I began to tell him about Melissa, how we were getting along easier all the time and how the petty jealousies that had been breaking us up every so often for months were now evaporating, one by one. He listened, but didn't say much—maybe he couldn't really understand.

At one point he said, "I think she's hot for you, Richardson."

"Well," I replied, shaking my head, "I wouldn't put it that way. She's a nice girl, you know? Great girl. One thing I will say, though. Tonight something happened that has never happened before. About

all I've ever done with Melissa is kiss her. And I like it that way. I think much more of her than that." I hesitated; he wasn't Anthony.

A slight smile tugging his lips, Charles looked away and finally said, "Yeah, I know. I had a girlfriend once."

"Really?" I said, surprised and encouraged. "Well. This may sound funny, but—well, for the longest time, I've wanted to just touch her thighs. Every time after a game, when she's in her cheerleading uniform, I've thought how neat it would be to just touch her thighs—they're so smooth and white. But I never did, because I didn't want her to think bad of me." Charles' face was a stone mask in the flickering glare of the TV; he nodded, almost imperceptibly, as if in understanding.

"Well tonight, Charles, her parents are asleep, and we're on her couch, and because we're laying back, her skirt has hiked up—and there they are again. So beautiful!" I took a long cool drink of Coke and paused to let the biting tingle in my throat fade away. Charles didn't say a thing, only stared straight ahead at the silent flickering TV screen.

"Then, Charles, as if she knows, she picks up my hand and moves it, pushes it down on her legs, and she smiles at me, and closes her eyes. She pulls her skirt up even higher, and on her left thigh I see this cherry-red birthmark, a perfect little diamond shape. I touched her thighs only for a second—they were so soft and smooth, and a little damp. And I pulled her skirt back down. And that was it. Incredible!" I finished off the Coke and began chewing on an ice cube.

I told him all that without ever saying anything about him keeping it under his hat; friends shouldn't need promises, and I considered him my friend.

Still staring at the TV screen, Charles laughed. "Like I said, she's hot for you, Richardson."

What was there to do, but laugh with him? "By George, I think you're right," I replied. How could he really

understand right now, anyway? He would learn.

I left thinking Charles was a normal person after all, not hard to like if you gave him a chance. Looking back on that talk we had now, I still can hardly believe what he did to me.

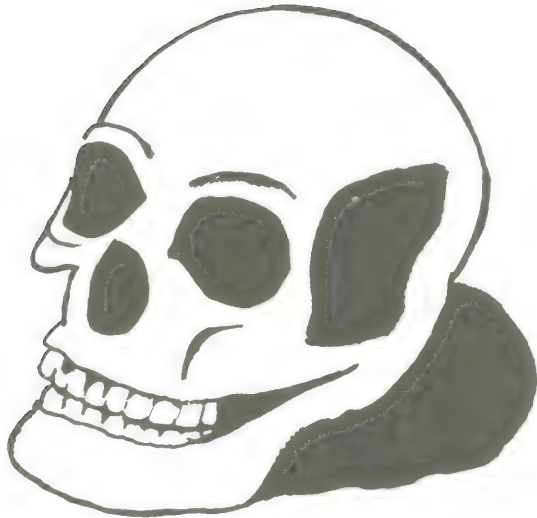
The very next day of school, the Monday following, is when he did it. He waited until lunch. We had Salisbury steak that day, my favorite cafeteria cuisine, and I never even got to take one bite. The last one from our table to get through the line, I sat down on Charles' right. I had just peeled open my milk carton.

Charles said, not loudly, but during a lull in the conversation, and quite clearly, "Melissa, Richardson told me, but I don't know if I believe it, that you have a birthmark the shape of a diamond at the very top inside of your left thigh."

Everyone stared at me for what seemed a very long time—everyone, that is, except Charles, who continued to gaze mildly at Melissa across the table as if he had remarked to her about the weather. Melissa's face paled, then reddened; she tried to hold back the sobs, but she couldn't contain them all.

Everything after that happened in slow motion, distorted like watching a film on an uneven movie screen. It's funny how irrational you can be in a tense situation. I hit Charles solidly on the ear. His chair tipped, and he sprawled on the floor. I kicked him in the face. Then Coach Nix had wrestled me to the floor, where I lay pinned.

I didn't struggle, but went quietly. Kenny stared, speechless for once, at the blood from Charles' nose spattered on the floor. I saw Anthony comforting Melissa. Her face was buried in his chest. His arms encircled her, one hand tenderly holding her head. Our eyes met over her head. But a wall, something strange, separated me now from them all, and I wondered if it hadn't always been there; it looked old and permanent.



Alan Eskew

West 1 Line 127

Something there is that doesn't love a wall.¹

This cold, black place
With yards of memories.
Fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, lovers
Are here
But no more.
No one lives at this address.
This wall retains nothing.
This perfect structure partitioning pain
Mirrors back only anguish and despair.

by Stephanie Johns Bond

¹: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall

Consider This: Blindfolded Near Phnom Penh ¹

Skulls blindfolded,
stark against black rags,
worm-gnawed burlap.
Gray flesh, blotched green and moist,
still clings to wrists,
wire-taut, even to the bone.

²Bright red blood which covers our fields

But there is no music among these skulls,
no roses where flames were,
only a ratel grating claws,
slashing bloated rodents,
only metal-green beetles crawling through foramen,
chaotic fungus and mold.

blood of workers and peasants
blood of revolutionary men

Are we not fearful?
Are we not charred frozen from the static horror
of a mound of skulls taller than our fathers,
a calcic ziggurat looming silent,
a fleshless ruined god?
Isn't the shadow in this valley
darker than the ashes of our greatest dread?

blood changing into unrelenting hatred

Is it later?
No, it is past that afternoon
and the convoluted rubble is wider,
supporting only the mute derelict.

and resolute struggle.

shear your tongue
slice your eyelids
nail your hands to the table
be silent
be still
witness
the apocalypse of wonder
the final genocide of beauty

by Tom Neeley

1: Phnom Penh is the capitol of Cambodia.

2: Quoted from the "National Anthem" of the Khmer Rouge.

Are Five Letter Grades Enough?

Professor cries denial of academic freedom

by J. H. Fenner

Since I began teaching in 1974, I have been faced with the difficulty (as well as challenge) of evaluating student performance fairly and equitably. As I reasoned then, the only legitimate function and purpose of assigning grades was to separate students according to ability and/or achievement in meeting course goals and objectives. I immediately realized the traditional five letter grades, A, B, C, D, and F, were utterly inadequate for that intended purpose. Not only are there far more than five distinct levels of achievement, but the rather arbitrary point values assigned to each letter grade (A = 4, B = 3, etc.) exhibit gross and, to me at least, unjustifiable discrepancies.

For example, the grade "C" has a point value 100% higher than a "D" (two points vs one), but a "B" is "only" 50% better than a "C." Is a "C" student really twice as good as a "D" student; whereas, a "B" student is only half again as good as a "C" student? Should a student who just misses a "C" be penalized so heavily? Is a "C" grade really twice as valuable as a "D"? I believe very strongly the answer to each of these questions must logically be a resounding "No!" Unfortunately, few schools recognize grades such as "C+" or "B-."

Another weakness of traditional grading lies in the grade "C" not being the "average" grade it should represent. In the vast majority of colleges across the nation, students with a "C" average (a 2.00 grade point average) find themselves just barely avoiding academic probation, just barely staying in school, and, if they escape being ejected, just barely meeting graduation requirements. Further, they will meet very

stiff obstacles to finding a job. Does that sound like the fate of an "average" student? Not to me, it doesn't. The two points assigned to a "C" places that grade well below the mean (i.e. average) GPA on every campus in the nation. Even euphemistically calling a "C" the grade signifying "satisfactory scholarship" does not change the fact that a "C" grade lies well below average. The "C" has not been an "average" grade for generations (if it ever was), and students know that. They feel maligned, and rightly so, when they receive the well-below average "C" for doing average work. Unfortunately for instructors, the only option currently open is to give the "superior" grade "B" for average achievement. Breaking this "damned if I do, damned if I don't" predicament requires only "+" and "-" grades, as I intend to demonstrate.

"C" has a point value 100% higher than a "D", but a "B" is only 50% better than a "C"

When I attended Oregon State University (OSU) in the 1960's, the student newspaper published the all-campus grade point average (GPA) each quarter. It hovered around 2.5 every term for the two years I went there. The "national" GPA (the average of 135 public and private colleges and universities, presumably a representative cross-section) was slightly lower at that time. I suggested that OSU institute "+" grades, have grade point values of 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5, because the "C+" at 2.5 was demonstrably the real "average" grade, both on campus and nationwide. Nothing happened.

A few years later, I attended St. Louis University, which did officially recognize the "C+." Unfor-

tunately, in my three semesters there, I only met one student who ever received that grade. That a school offers the most useful grade "C+", but instructors fail to use it bothered me then, and still does. I consider the "C+" an absolutely necessary grade.

Apparently, most schools—even St. Louis with its "C+"—continue to muddle through with the extremely limited five traditional (and perhaps archaic?) letter grades, with no "in between" values. For a common five-credit-hour course, instructors can only assign A = 20 points, B = 15, etc. They cannot assign, e.g. A- = 18 or C = 12, because those combinations of grade and point value do not exist. I honestly believe they should, both to be fair and equitable to students, and to give instructors considerably more options in evaluating performances.

But administrations and many professors argue, "Why should we introduce "+" and "-" grades now, when the traditional system has worked for generations?" First, it's a loaded question: I do not believe the system has worked! The "national" GPA climbed from about 2.4 in the 1960's through 2.74 in 1975, to about 3.1 in the early 1980's. I lay the blame for this rampant grade inflation to the absence of "B-" and "C+" grades. If faculty could give intermediate grades (and point values), I firmly believe grade inflation would soon cease—provided, of course, faculty actually used those grades. Students, I am sure, would not mind receiving a "C+" as "average" performance,

because that grade does in fact lie in the middle of the grade scale. On the other hand, they do not accept a "C" as "average," because that grade lies well below even the "national" mean of some years ago.

Second, since grading should be fair to students (my basic premise), then instructors should have more than five grades available. Plus and minus grades give them more than a dozen to select. The five traditional grades do not and cannot ever adequately separate students according to ability and performance, which, I maintain, is the only legitimate function of grading. Let's take a state university in Maryland, where I taught part-time for a few years, as an example. According to their written guidelines for grading, instructors should give about 10% A, 25% B, 45% C, and 20% worse (D and F). Let's look at this grade distribution more closely.

The "C" has not been an average grade for generations (if it ever was)

If 35% of the students should, on average, receive A's and B's, and 45% C's, then the 40th student in a class of 100 should, on average, receive a C. So would the 78th student. Surely those two students have not demonstrated equal ability or performance in the class! The student ranked 40th lies above the class mean, the one ranked 78th well below. Yet both receive the same (below average) grade, a C. That strikes me as blatantly unfair! I am penalizing the 40th student, but playing Santa Claus to the 78th. I, for one, would dearly like to assign the 40th student a B- or a C+, the

78th student a C- or a D; however, Maryland, like most other schools, did not allow that.

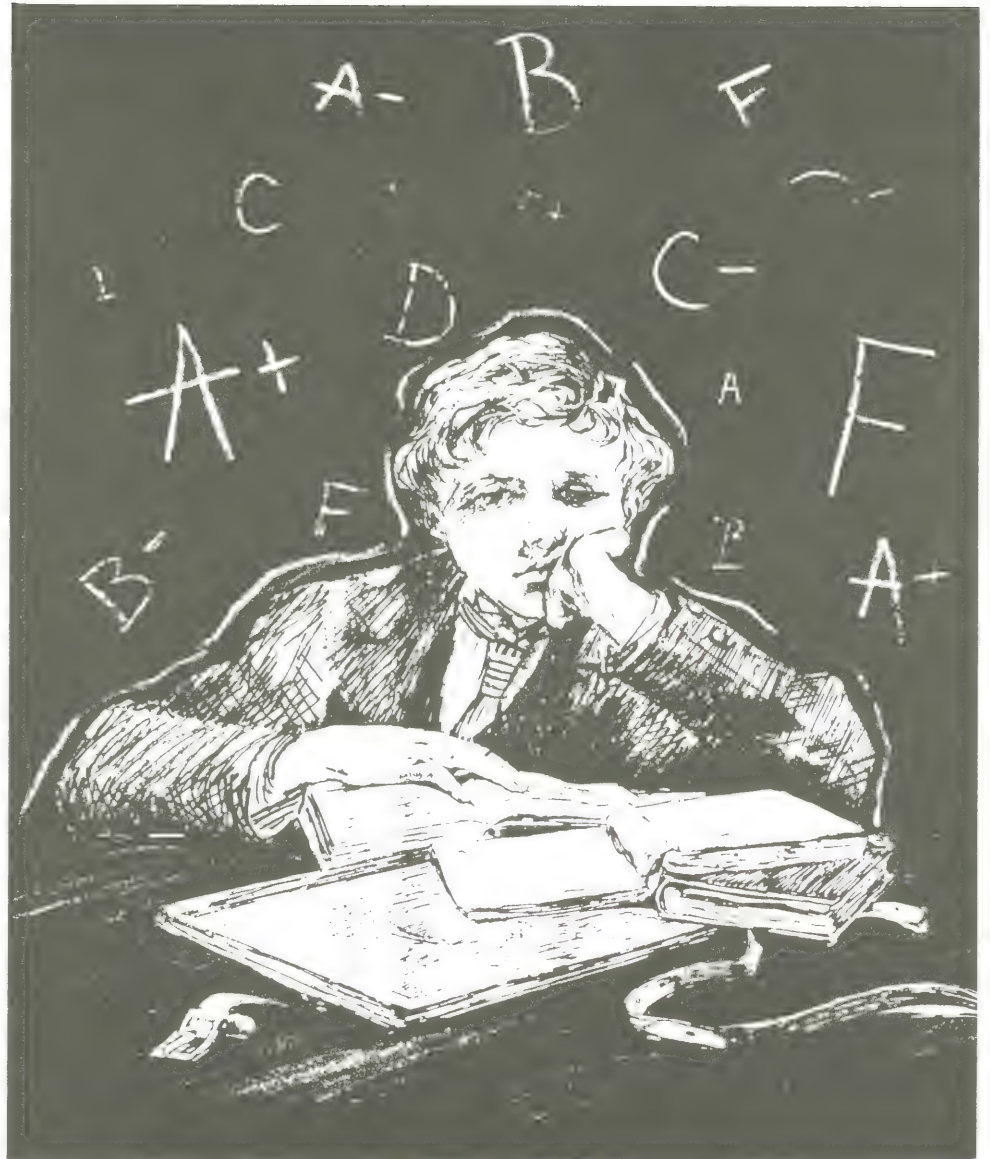
The same reasoning applies to the 13th and 33rd students, both of whom should, on average, receive B's. The 13th student may very well deserve an A-, the 33rd a B-. Again, neither grade existed at the Maryland school. Nor do they exist at Auburn.

Third, if individual faculty members do not wish to use intermediate grades, no one would force them to do so. However, by voting against allowing plus and minus grades, they are, in effect, denying

me my academic freedom to assign the grade I consider appropriate to the student and the course. I personally resent that.

In summary, I ask the same question I have posed since 1963, a quarter of a century ago: "Why don't '+' and '-' grades, with intermediate point values, exist at this university?" No one has yet been able to justify the traditional grades to my satisfaction, but not much has happened to change the grading system, either.

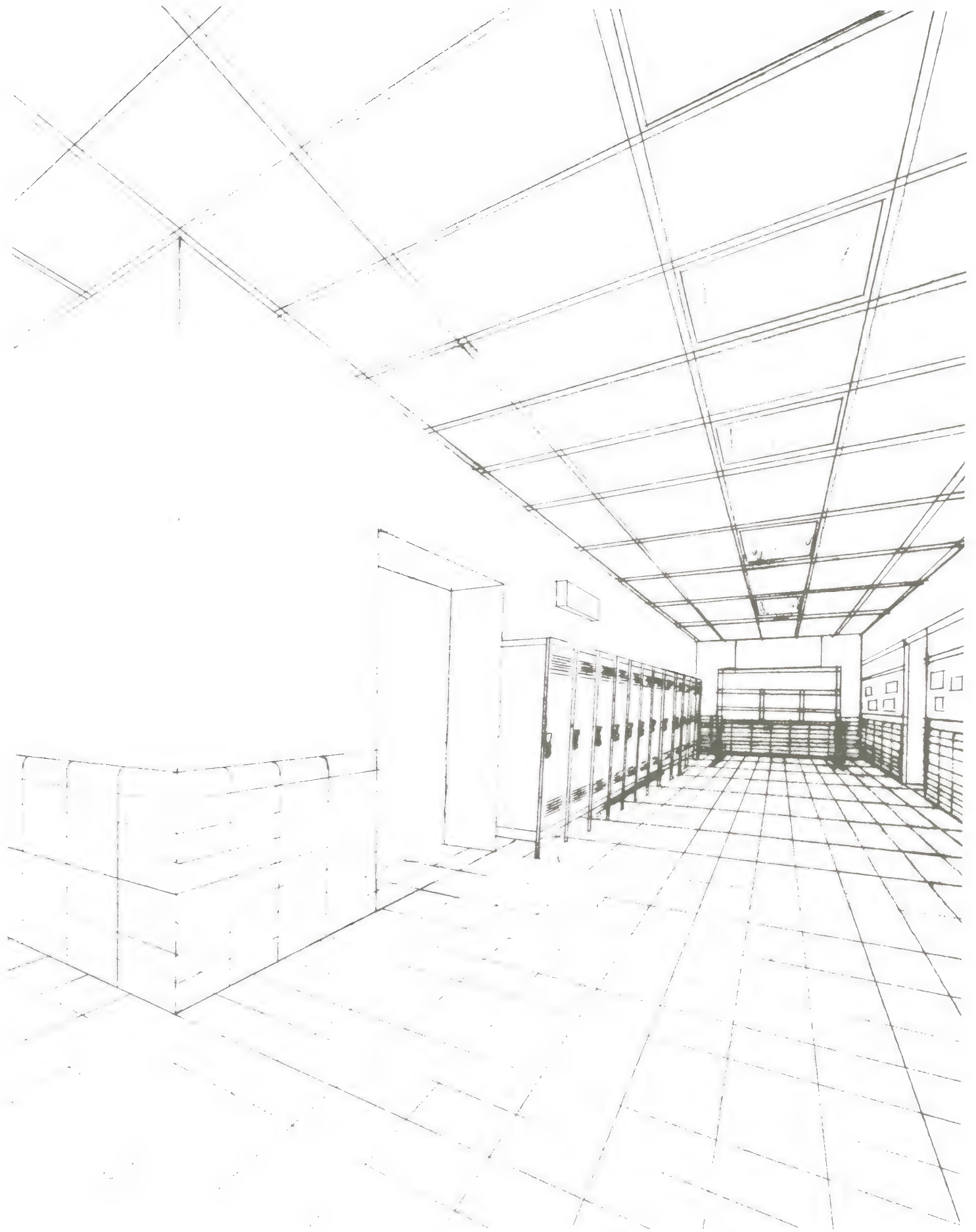
Here follows my proposal for grades and point values:



Susan L. Bogle

<u>Grade</u>	<u>one-credit- hour course point value</u>	<u>two-credit- hour course point value</u>	<u>3-credit- hour course point value</u>	<u>4-credit- hour course point value</u>	<u>5-credit- hour course point value</u>
A	4 points	8 Points	12 points	16 points	20 points
A -	-	7	11	15	19 or 18
B +	-	-	10	14 or 13	17 or 16
B	3	6	10	12	15
B -	-	5	8	11 or 10	14 or 13
C +	-	-	7	9	12 or 11
C	2	4	6	8	10
C -	-	3	5	7 or 6	10
D +	-	-	4	5	7 or 6
D	1	2	3	4	5
D -	1	1	2 or 1	3, 2, or 1	1 to 4
F	0	0	0	0	0

For grades having more than one point value, I envision the point value assigned to the individual student's grade to be the instructor's choice, thus giving faculty the maximum leeway.



Hamlet, Prince of Darkness

A Southern gothic, Transylvanian, really deep play in about three acts

DRAMATIS PERSONA

Hamlet	John Belushi
Ghost of Hamlet's father	Elvis
Horatio	Robin Leech
Claudius	Rob Lowe
Gertrude	Ally Sheedy
Laertes	Sean Penn
Ophelia	Madonna
Polonious	Ollie North
Rosencrantz	George Bush
Guildenstern	Mike Dukakis
Thalia	Gina Herring

other associated
characters such as guards,
ladies in waiting, who cares
men-at-arms, lawyers,
dancers, the audience,
etc.

NOTE: For those not simply riveted in their seats by this supreme tragedy, there will be half-hour breaks between acts. So any pursuits of love, liberty, and life can be made while still being tickled and terrified by this quest for meaning.

ACT I

A dreary curtain opens on a dreary castle called Elsie located atop a dreary mountain in a dreary remote Romanian village or more likely, in the backwoods of North Georgia. The castle walls are covered with kudzu and the howling of wolves and stray dogs is ever present, as is the sound of pickup trucks roaring down the dirt roads honking out "Dixie."

(Enter a couple a guys with really hard names nobody needs to know. They don't see each other and are obviously guards.)

Testiclus: Hark who goes there?

Phallusis: Who do you think?

Testiclus: Dost thou not knowth of the ghost that haunts these lonely moors at midnight. Speaking to no one and always departing wince the cock crows.

Phallusis: Dost thou not know of speech therapy to clear up that problem. As for cocks crowing and ghost moaning, thou have obviously been smoking the royal weeds.

Testiclus: False recreationist. Stay here when the caller calls the midnight hour and thou shalt see.

Phallusis: So I will dupe. But honorable Horatio, close friend of our Dark Prince and well known television investigator of extreme regatitis, shall join us in this ghost hunt, for yonder he comes bellowing.

(Enter Horatio, dressed in finery that still cannot cover up his tick physique. He is accompanied by several fellow boot-kissers, one of whom carries a large portable stereo from which blasts their theme song):

Just for the satisfaction

Just for the

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH

Just for the money

Do some coke

Horatio: Hello! Hello! Hello, my friends! How goes, How goes my friends? Here at this most loveliest of castles in these gorgeous dreary woods, we are visiting the most royal family of King Claudius, known to his fawning peasant subjects as The King II. Love, honor, money and more money are ever so evident as we partake of cavalier dreams and Judas kisses. How does it go most highly decorated and low ranking guards.

Phallusis: Not well Horatio for tonight we spot a ghost, a spirit from the foul nether regions come to torment the souls of man in this misbegotten realm. We risk our very existence. But among us stands this unbeliever (motions to Testiclus, as line prompter faints in disbelief.)

Testiclus: Most stupidest moron. Thou speakest my lines.

Horatio (Powdering his nose): Stop thine whining. It is only plot procession and most know not the difference between thy two. But hark what strange lights come from that distant space where lies an open grave that was not there moments before. Methinks we all ought to go closer and peer within to see what possible unnameable thing comes into our world.

Phallusis: Methinks thy have powdered thine nose once too often. Go aheadest if thou may for my head I wish to protect.

Testiclus: And I accordingly. But look something large this way doth come.

Music

(the opening part of 2001 or wherever that song comes from)

lots of kettle drums:

dum. Dum. DUM!

DA Dum!

Dum dum

Dum dum

(Enter Elvis, the ghost of Hamlet's father, just as the music breaks into that Las Vegas sound. Elvis is in his finest white jumpsuit with matching cape)

Horatio (Screams): What matter of foul thing beist thy?

Elvis (Struts across the stage toward Horatio, simultaneously raises left lip and left arm, extends index finger, and shifts several hundred pounds around to achieve that pelvis position. Looks like Moby Dick in heat. The music stops for Elvis to express): Hey.

(pause of several minutes for the depth of this line to sink in)

Elvis: Wait a minute. This ain't Graceland? Where's the Colonel? I don't need this man. I've been in hell. They made me an Elvis memorabilia salesman. So many salt shakers and plates and Ronco albums. The orders never stopped. (Elvis breaks down and cries a little, wipes his face with quickly appearing handkerchief and then tosses it into an audience of screaming pre, post, and very post pubescent women who all proceed to scramble for the Holy Relic amidst fainting and fighting.)

Horatio: What does thou want, creature of much sweat and promotor of K-Mart?

Elvis: I want the continued respect and admiration that my overrated career deserves, but I'll settle for Hamlet.

Horatio: We shall bring him to you, just cover thine shining studs and wait for our return.

(Exit, in a hurry, Horatio, followed by Phallisus and then Testiclus)

Intermission

High school students who were encouraged to attend for no understandable reason are now encouraged to move from their seats making as much noise as possible.

The ghost of Elvis entertains during this break, singing the same songs over and over again.

ACT II

(Enter Hamlet, Prince of Darkness. He is dressed all in black and when not speaking assumes a bad Lugosi impression with his short cape. He is usually slipping small vials to Horatio as well as other sychophants. Elvis is only too happy to see him.)

Elvis: Colonel Hamlet, how goes it man? Got anything for a guy from beyond.

Hamlet: Don't call me Colonel anymore. Now, I am the Prince of Darkness. What does thou want, ever so large shade.

Elvis: I came to demand that thou reform and revenge my death.



Alan Eskew

Hamlet: Hey man. That wasn't my fault. I wasn't there. The cops can't prove nothin'.

Elvis: Not you. Your new father, King Claudius. Who puts me in eternal torment by every Saturday night performing as my worst impersonator in his band the Carkeys.

Hamlet: I knowist of this blasphemy. Laertes plays lead guitar in that damnable assemblage. My mother has even been seen to shake the royal tambourine during "That's all right momma."

Elvis: I know of thine mother's transgressions, but leavest her alone. For her punishment comest sooner then thou thinkest.

Hamlet: What does thou wantest me to do oh bestest customer?

Elvis: What the Hell does thou thinkest. Destroy he who blasphemes me. (Elvis is seen to slowly ascend amidst heavenly musak versions of various Elvis songs. As he ascends he is joined by the three Evangelical Stooges, Jerry, Jimmy, and Jim who echo his yells for revenge with)

Jerry (seeing checkbooks): Pay Me!

Jimmy (seeing t.v. cameras, cries with many tears): Forgive Me!

Jim (seeing the first girl in the first seat, shouts): Call Me!

(Exeunt everyone else)

ACT III (thank Buddha)

(Enter Hamlet, alone on an empty stage with no one else there.)

Hamlet: To Be or not to be...

(Enter Laertes, playing with his loud black Fender, dressed in tight orange striped black spandex pants. As his guitar screams, so does he)

Excuse me while I kiss the sky!

Hamlet: Canst thou see we are doing the intellectual part of the play.

Laertes: Canst thou see our audience leaving.

Hamlet: True. Bring on thine sister for a sex scene.

Laertes: Okay. But givest me some of that devil's dandruff for we still have the violent scenes to do.

Hamlet: True. We must cross blades soon. (Tosses him a vial)

Laertes: Snort. snort. Okay. (Exits)

(Enter Ophelia in a big white Southern hoop skirt dress. Her drawl is so southern that molasses or ectoplasma drips from the walls and werewolves run screaming from her high pitched voice.)

Ophelia: Well, hello there Hammy dear. How you doin' my little Dark Princey pooh?

Hamlet (advances on the vamp with his black cape drawn up around his face): I want to suck your blood! or throw up.

Ophelia: Oh yucky. Not that again. I told you. We got to wait till your mommy and Uncle Claudy aren't around. And you know what a jealous bad boy Laertes is. Plus what about my pappy. Here he comes now.

(Enter Polonius with a large entourage of lawyers all whispering in his ears.)

Polonius: Fellow actor, after due consultation with eminent legal scholars from many firms and after much discussion about ramifications and implications various approaches to this role may entail I must conclude that as an American and believer in America, and defender of American values passed down from decent family to decent family, all of whom I have defended in this great country I can only say...

(Polonius rips off over decorated robe revealing a tight fitting black leather suit as the music cranks up in the background. With a loud snap of his fingers, he becomes Ollie Jackson. The lawyers all neatly fall into their correct dance positions behind him as he begins gyrating and thrusting and shouting)

Cause I'm Mad!

I'm Mad!

Dont' cha know it!

I'm nuts!

I'm insane!

(Hamlet pulls out a two foot samurai sword from beneath his cape, becoming Samurai Thespian, and shouting YAHHHHH! decapitates Polonius with one fell swoop.)

Sword: Swoop!

Head: Fell. Bong. Bong. (Exeunt several unemployed lawyers, looking for recent accident victims)

(Hamlet walks over and picks up Polonius's head)

Hamlet: Ollie, I know you all too well. (Punts the head offstage)

Ophelia: Pappy.

Hamlet: Enough satire. Let's have some gratuitous sex and violence.

(Baring fangs he swoops across the stage and bites into the neck of the slightly resisting Ophelia who soon swoons into his arms and the cape covers them both. The stage goes black as only the sucking sounds of Hamlet can be heard plus a few moans from Ophelia. Soon the snorting sounds of the arriving Horatio and Laertes are heard as they enter. The lights come up on them and they are followed by Claudius and Gertrude. Claudius is dressed in his Elvis impersonation outfit, while his Queen wears a tight black leather mini-skirt and carries a tambourine. The others see the dead Ophelia on the floor with the wound in her neck, while Hamlet stands in the corner licking his blood stained lips)

Claudius (in a weak imitation of Elvis): What be this? Hamlet? Are you the cause of this tragedy? (continues overacting)

Laertes: Of course he is. My dear sweet sister. More fair than the delicate tulips that blossom only in the fairest sunlight. More precious than the faint moonlight which shines so delicately on our sacred homeland. More vibrant...

(Ophelia, rising from the dead and looking even paler than usual, rips off her antebellum dress with much gesture, reveals a very short, see-through diaphanous shift and shouts): Laertes, shut up! Band.

(The Carkeys, who have unobtrusively slipped on to stage with a lot of electronic musical equipment break into some funk. Ophelia takes center stage and begins gyrating madly as she is joined by several dancers all out of work since Ollie lost his head)

Ophelia:

I'm an...!

Immaterial wraith!

Immaterial wraith!

(Gertrude joins in as a backup singer with tambourine as Ophelia continues singing. Then she rises from the stage and ascends upward, disappearing with a lot of glitzy effects)

Hamlet: Geez. Can't anybody leave by that door that's always open.

Claudius: Does this mean we won't be having any of my scenes of moral dilemma or ethical conflict.

Hamlet: No we won't.

Claudius: Well listen here you bloated snorting toad, I've got a contract. I'm an actor! I'm in the brat pack!

(Hamlet pulls out a 45 Magnum revolver from beneath his cape and proceeds to put several holes into Claudius): Act that Mr. Brat Pack. (He looks over at Gertrude and instead of his mother, for whom he has several unresolved Oedipal urges, he sees only Ally Sheedy): Bang! Bang! (Thunderous applause from the audience)

(Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arguing continuously).

Rosencrantz: Shorty!

Guildenstern: Wimp!

Rosencrantz: Geek!

Guildenstern: Moron!

Rosencrantz: Are to!

Guildenstern: Am not!

(After several minutes of this indepth discussion of competency and issue standing, Hamlet votes with a sawed off shotgun from beneath his cape. He votes against both candidates): Boom! Boom!

(Horatio and entourage begin taking pictures as Horatio begins bellowing as usual): People! People! You saw it first here on "Lifestyles of the Greedy Rich and Socially Retarded."

(In the media blitz Laertes' picture is accidentally taken. Still trying to recover from Ophelia's departure, he draws his sword and stabs Horatio who expires with a lot of hot air. Thunderous applause. Then Laertes turns toward Hamlet)

Laertes: Foul fiend of unfathomable fathoms. To hell I send thee.

Hamlet: Pretty good alliteration. But you need to work on the iambic pentameter. (Draws out a light saber and cuts Laertes in half.) Okay who is still alive. (Sees several onstage still living, all just extras. Hamlet takes out an Uzi from his cape and sprays the survivors. After emptying a couple of clips he tosses the weapon aside and turns. He sees there are still several alive in the audience. Deciding this is performance art, he pulls out a phaser and proceeds to disintegrate the audience. He then turns, now getting dizzy from turning so much, and from afar hears Elvis baying out "Hound Dog." He listens intently for a minute and then stares intently out into the absolutely, positively barren stage, except for several thousand dead bodies scattered around. Hamlet shoots the writer.

Thunderless applause. More Elvis singing and a final honking of "Dixie."

Hamlet: Children of the Night! Oh what wonderful music that duth make! (He turns)

Hamlet: Oh yeah. A play's the thing.

(Then with a flip of his cape he turns into a bat and flies away)

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mostly by Forrest Rush
with material supplied
by them

The End

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